programa final

Encontro Nacional de Produtores e Usuários de Informações Sociais, Econômicas e Territoriais

INFORMAÇÃO PARA UMA SOCIEDADE MAIS JUSTA

III Conferência Nacional de Geografia e Cartografia

IV Conferência Nacional de Estatística

Reunião de Instituições Produtoras

Fórum de Usuários

Seminário "Desafios para Repensar o Trabalho"

Simpósio de Inovações

Jornada de Cursos

Mostra de Tecnologias de Informação

27 a 31 de maio de 1996
Rio de Janeiro, RJ BRASIL

IBGE 60 anos 1936-1996

Uma das maneiras de olhar o ofício de produzir informações sociais, econômicas e territoriais é como arte de descrever o mundo. Estatísticas e mapas transportam os fenômenos da realidade para escalas apropriadas à perspectiva de nossa visão humana e nos permitem pensar e agir à distância, construindo avenidas de mão dupla que juntam o mundo e suas imagens. Maior o poder de síntese dessas representações, combinando, com precisão, elementos dispersos e heterogêneos do cotidiano, maior o nosso conhecimento e a nossa capacidade de compreender e transformar a realidade.

Visto como arte, o ofício de produzir essas informações reflete a cultura de um País e de sua época, como essa cultura vê o mundo e o torna visível, redefinindo o que vê e o que há para se ver.

No cenário de contínua inovação tecnológica e mudança de culturas da sociedade contemporânea, as novas tecnologias de informação - reunindo computadores, telecomunicações e redes de informação - aceleram aquele movimento de mobilização do mundo real. Aumenta a velocidade da acumulação de informação e são ampliados seus requisitos de atualização, formato - mais flexível, personalizado e interativo - e, principalmente, de acessibilidade. A plataforma digital vem se consolidando como o meio mais simples, barato e poderoso para tratar a informação, tornando possíveis novos produtos e serviços e conquistando novos usuários.

Acreditamos ser o ambiente de conversa e controvérsia e de troca entre as diferentes disciplinas, nas mesas redondas e sessões temáticas das Conferências Nacionais de Geografia, Cartografia e Estatística e do Simpósio de Inovações, aquele que melhor enseja o aprimoramento do consenso sobre os fenômenos a serem mensurados para retratar a sociedade, a economia e o território nacional e sobre as prioridades e formatos das informações necessárias para o fortalecimento da cidadania, a definição de políticas públicas e a gestão político - administrativa do País, e para criar uma sociedade mais justa.

Simon Schwartzman
Coordenador Geral do ENCONTRO

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Registramos ainda a colaboração de técnicos das diferentes áreas do IBGE, com seu trabalho, críticas e sugestões para a consolidação do projeto do ENCONTRO.

Comments on Alain Desrosières: "L'administrateur et le Savant - Les Métamorphoses du métier de Statisticien"

Simon Schwartzman

Presented to the "Encontro Nacional de Produtores e Usuários de Informações Sociais, Econômicas e Territoriais", Rio de Janeiro, 1996.

Alain Desrosières' paper provides a rich picture of the tensions among the different roles of the Statistician in European countries, arising from their double roles as administrators and scientists. It is not just that these roles are different, but they belong also to different professional cultures, and have evolved in peculiar ways. On one side, the civil servant, bound to respond with professionalism to the requirements of the governments for which they work; on the other, the scholar, bound to work according to the cannons of academic freedom and independence that are typical of universities.

Public statistics begun as an element in the construction of the modern nation states, and very early combined these two roles. More recently, two new and opposite trends are emerging. First, there is the strong tendency for supranational cooperation and integration, as witnessed by institutions such as Eurostat, the United Nations Statistical Commission and several other regional bodies. Second, there is a growing trend for the development of specialized data gathering and data analysis operations demanded by local, regional or specialized groups and sectors. The requirements of international comparability and consistency, on one hand, and more immediate local relevance, on the other, can face the professional statisticians and their institutions with difficult choices.

Desrosières shows also how the kinds of data and the methodologies of data collection have also evolved, by the introduction of probabilistic techniques and mathematical modeling, and by the growing association between statistics and economics, mostly through the development of systems of national accounts. In this process, the linkages between statistical offices and universities also increased, through the need to recruit persons with the proper scientific and technical training and background. As other subject

matters enter the agenda of statistical offices - social issues such as employment, education, health, agriculture, environment conditions, social and political participation, race, language, social discrimination - the professional profile of statisticians also changes. Other professional identities - that of the economists, of course, but also sociologists, educators, environment and health specialists - may be stronger in many statistical agencies than that of the statistician himself. This proposition should be verified empirically, since users of data are not necessarily trained and interested in the chores of data gathering, processing and validation, which are typical of the daily work of statistical agencies. If true, it could be related to the fact that statistics today, as an academic subject, is essentially a specialized branch of mathematics, while statistical skills are an increasing component of the education in all social and economically related fields, and greatly facilitated by the use of ready-made software. In many countries, these separate specialties are associated with the multiplication of statistical institutions - the United States is probably the extreme, but not the only case. When the statistical offices are unified - as in Brazil or Mexico, which include also geography under their umbrella - the consequence may be the development of internally differentiated technical cultures, more related to each academic field outside than with the other sectors within the institution.

The linkages between statistical agencies, academic disciplines and universities are obviously for the good, but they may be also a source of tensions, because official statistics has two faces that may sometimes collide. It is "official," and in this sense may have legal implications (when, for instance, salaries are pegged to cost of living indicators) or affect decisions of governmental and private agents; and because of that should be built as unambiguously and precisely as possible; and is "statistics," probability constructs which are subject not only to sampling errors but also to the uncertainties of technical and operational definitions of any quantitative empirical research, which are so familiar to the specialists in academe.

Moreover, universities are also changing. Intellectually, in the social and economic fields at least, there is a tendency to move from the "naturalist" attitude, described by Desrosières on his paper, toward a more "constructivist" understanding of the scientific

and technical work. This tendency is related to the growing awareness of the contingent nature of much of what used to be presented as "objective" knowledge, fueled by the growing accumulation of evidence coming from the new anthropology and sociology of science and technology. This accumulation of evidence has led to a growing (and sometimes bitter) debate on the epistemological status of scientific knowledge which we could not try to reproduce here, but also to a growing awareness that one cannot really understand what takes place in science without looking around for the way it is embedded in complex social, cultural, economic and physical realities.

The second trend is the growing skepticism about comprehensive systems of social analysis and interpretation, which are associated with the demise of comprehensive planning as a tool of government policy; and the expansion of applied, goal-oriented and product-oriented research. An important element of this change is the breaking down of disciplinary barriers and the development of all kinds of interdisciplinary and interinstitutional cooperation and networking in all knowledge fields. These two intellectual changes are related, in turn, to the growing pressures upon universities to link more closely with industry and to relate to many other social groups besides the usual students - to leave the ivory tower and to respond more pragmatically to short-term demands.

To these trends one should add another, not discussed in detail in Desrosières paper, related to the role of the computer specialist and the computer science in statistical offices. From Hollerith on, Statistical offices have always been heavy users and developers of computer technology, and in Mexico, interestingly enough, the statistical office is still called "Instituto Nacional de Estadistica, Geografia e Informática," the last word standing for the "information science," better known today as computer science. The notion that the production of public statistics and the coordination of research and public policy in the computer industry should be handled by the same agency does not seem to make much sense today, but is not too absurd if we remember statistical officers were pioneers in the use of large scale data processing. The close association that may have existed between the computer specialist, or information specialist, and the statistical office is mostly in the past now, and today statistical agencies are just users and buyers of

computer hardware and software, as most everybody else. The penetration of modern computer technologies coming from the industry in the statistical agencies has some parallels with the penetration of academic knowledge coming from universities. In both cases the statistical agencies become less autonomous, and more dependent on outside expertise and standards of efficiency and quality than before. More significantly, the way the computer technologies are evolving is similar to the way knowledge fields are also evolving: away from big, rigid and hierarchical systems; more adapted to the end user; more pragmatic; and with strong emphasis on linkages and networking.

If we put all these trends together, a picture of the future may emerge, and I would like to make it explicit as a subject for discussion. The neat association between statistical offices and the statistical profession, which still exists in the minds and in the corporate culture of many agencies, is being weakened. The tensions between central integration and local demands, internationalism and nationalism, different professional orientations and unified professional cultures, administrators and "savants," are not likely to be resolved by the dominance of one side upon the other on each pair, but by different combinations of these elements. Statistical agencies are likely to evolve from their main role of generators of comprehensive systems of information towards the role of providers of statistical information to a plurality of end users. The work on international comparability will continue, but probably more to provide translations between different systems than to develop and carry unified operations - in Desrosières' terms, more "en aval" than "en amount." The work of translation will be needed not only to allow for comparisons among data collected in different countries and cultures, but also for combining information arising from different professional cultures and specialties - economists, sociologists, environment specialists, political scientists.

On the long run, this task of consolidating, translating and communicating information may become the central identity of the statistical offices, affecting the places now occupied by statisticians, economists and computer specialists. Statistical offices will be the places where data from different sources - including their own - are systematized, sorted, compared, evaluated and distributed, and from where new standards will emerge. They will respond to the demands and be financed not only by national governments, but

also by international bodies, private groups and local interests, and their products will adjust to these new clients. What professional profiles will be associated with these new tasks? In addition to those already in place, one can think of linguistics, artificial intelligence and in the knowledge sciences (from epistemology to the sociology of science and cultural studies) as potential disciplines that should come together for these tasks. What contribution they can actually make is still not clear. But it seems obvious that, as we look at the trends that are taking shape, we should also look for the intellectual and technical instruments we could use to cope with our changing realities.